The Status of Woman in Islam: Is Woman Equal to Man or Not?

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 6]

Introduction

Last week we heard the talk of Sister Yasmeen Shaikh[1] about the status of women in Islam, and equality between the sexes. Considering the points Yasmeen has raised, I will need three or four weeks until the next scheduled speaker, to comment and elaborate on those points and that is what I am going to do.

Before talking about equality between males and females, and how I look at it in terms of the Qur'anic verses and the Prophetic sayings and traditions, equality needs to be defined first. If we are talking about equality in physical capabilities, then there is no equality. And no one can deny that. If we are talking about the nature of a woman and the nature of a man, we say, no, they are not equal. A woman delivers children, while a man cannot deliver children, so they are not equal in that respect. With respect to emotions and the psychology of woman and man, can we say they are equal? They are not. The psychologists of nowadays describe the man as playing an instrumental role and that needs power, toughness and other special characteristics for the person who will perform that role. And the role, which is assigned to the woman, by the psychologists and sociologists, is the expressive role. That is a role which a man sometimes fails to do. It is based upon emotions, upon softness and closeness, and these characteristics confer the ability to rear children, and the woman is vouchsafed a special reward for that by Islam. So, in this respect, there is no equality between a man and a woman, because each one is assigned a role based upon their capability and special characteristics, although, this does not mean that there are no tough women – tougher than men – and, sometimes, there are soft men, who nearly look like women.

So what is equality and how do we define it? Equality between males and females is in the affairs of daily life, in the area of work, in rights of salary, in the daily dealings of life between a man and a woman in the house – that is equality. As a result, Islam calls marriage "life partnership". Partnership means that these two people agreed to certain terms in a civil contract. See, mistakenly, sometimes, we look at marriage as a religious contract. It is not a religious contract. It is a civil contract. Whatever the man and the woman agree to in that contract will

[1] Imam's new policy: "We are going to change the system of our lectures here [September 1995]. At least once a month, it is hoped, there will be a speaker from the community." Sister Yasmeen Shaikh was the first speaker.

govern their shared life. Religion touches upon this contract only in that, it states, there must be "a proposal from one party, and an approval from the other party, and two witnesses to the proposal and approval". That is what Islam requires. Religion is the base for any civil contract because there are Qur'anic verses, hadith,[2] interpretations, and schools of thought which dictate what that contract should be in the light of the Qur'an and the sunnah,[3] in order to make equality prevail.

Once a man came to the Prophet and asked: "Prophet, who, by definition, is my best friend, and the most deserving of my kindness and service?" He told him that it was his mother. He then asked:
"Who is the next?"
The Prophet said: "Your mother."
"Then, who is the next?"
And the Prophet again said: "Your mother."
The man asked for the fourth time: "Who is the next?"
He replied: "Your father."
"And who is the next?" He asked for the fifth time.
The Prophet said: "Your nearest relative."
He mentioned the mother thrice and the father once. Can we interpret this to mean that there is no equality between male and female, and that the woman is above man? Or, can we interpret this as an inequality between male and female in Islam, because Islam gives the woman three shares in the friendship of her children, and gives the man one share, and, as a result, the men should start to form the "men's liberation movement"? But we have to understand everything in its proper context: roles – there are roles which a man will not be as adept in doing as a woman, for example, taking care of a child. I don't care what the people say about how the fathers in America are caring for their children at home, a father can *never* have the softness that a mother has in that role. All of us are fathers – let us admit it – when our kids used to cry at night, we said to our wives, "Shut that kid up; I am working seven o'clock in the morning." [4]But the mother… is awake all night caring for the child, sometimes carrying him, and walking around from room to room. That is the failure of the husband, and the success of the wife. Can we say this means there is no equality?

If we study what life was like before the advent of Islam, then we will know what Islam did for both males and females. We know that, in Arabia, the female child used to be buried alive, and it was considered a shame when a female infant was born. Coinciding with that time in Arabia was the Golden Age of the Roman Empire, where a sort of marriage was practiced which they called *azwaaj bis-siyaadah* or "marriage with authority". The "marriage with authority" permitted the husband to beat his wife, kill her, or to sell her to another person. She was a piece of property. After his death, his eldest son inherited her, and he was free to marry her, or give her to somebody else. If you study the Roman law of that time, you will find these facts in it. Islam came to find these practices prevailing among the people, and showed the way to equality. Instead of being inherited like a piece of property, the woman became an inheritor in the estate of her father, her mother, her sister, brother, son, and daughter. She was entitled to her own property. As recently as 100 years ago, in French law, a woman could not own any property without the signature of her husband, whereas since the *inception* of Islam, a woman could own property be that her husband accepted or not.

In the tafseers[5] of the Qur'an, it is written that the problem between Qābeel and Hābeel centered around a woman, while the Qur'an mentions the story of Qābeel *wa* Hābeel – Cain and Abel, as they call them in English – and there is no indication of a dispute over a woman. Some of the *mofassireen*,[6] as I have said to you before, quote from some Christian books which talk about Eve being created from the rib of Adam. This is not correct, but it is written in some tafseers of the Qur'an. In the same manner, they talk about Cain and Abel arguing over a beautiful girl. According to this story, Eve, at the start of life, used to have twins – one boy and one girl – every time. The twins were considered closer, relatively speaking, so the boy, who was born last year, married the girl who was born this year, and vice versa. That is how the story goes, and that is how they interpret these things, and I don't know wherefrom, or what the source of all this is. How does one know these things? But, you find them in books of tafseer. So, they say that the girl born as the twin with Cain was very beautiful; but she was to marry the other brother. Cain considered this unfair, and questioned why his brother should take her. So they started to

[2] A report or account of what the Prophet said
[3] The example of the Prophet embodied in his statements and actions
[4] Imam is speaking in a soft, whispering, and tender voice
[5] Qur'anic exegesis
[6] Exegetes

argue, until one killed the other, and this was the first murder and crime committed on earth.

[Imam quotes Arabic verses, and explains:] [7]But, when we analyze the Qur'an, we find something else, other than this business of girls and women: the Qur'an says: mention to them the story of the two children of Adam; they each slaughtered an animal as *qurbani*[8] to God. It was accepted from one and not from the other. So, the one whose *qurban* was rejected said to his brother, "I am going to kill you." So, his nice brother, his pious brother, said, "God accepts the *qurban* of the pious people. If you extend your hand to kill me, I am not going to do the same, because I fear God – إِنِّي أَخَافُ اللَّهَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ." In spite of all that, the devilish son of Adam killed his brother. But, after he killed him, he started to regret his action. And, since this was the first incident of murder on earth, he did not know what to do with the dead body. He was confused, carrying the body of his brother over his back for a while, going here and there, not knowing what to do. So, who was the teacher? A raven. A raven came, and killed another raven, then dug up the ground and buried his brother. The raven taught the son of Adam something he did not know. What did the son of Adam say? "Woe to me. I failed to be like that raven." He repented for his crime.

See how the story is according to the text of the Qur'an?[9] There is no mention about woman, there is no mention about girls, yet, when we look in our tafseers, we find that they were arguing over an attractive girl, but they quote this from the books of others. When we explain the Qur'an, we have to stay grounded in the text. It is better to say, "We don't know; we leave it up to God", than to invent stories. This is another incident quoted to suggest that women are behind every trouble, but the Qur'an refutes that.

Just to remind you of what I have said before, the Christian books, as well as the Jewish books relate that Eve was the cause of the fall of Adam and his expulsion to earth, after he had lived in Heaven with no troubles, and no work; she was the root of the trouble; she lured Adam to eat from the tree. This is a Christian interpretation of the story, and, I'm sorry to say, our Muslim interpreters of the Qur'an have quoted these things, and you find them in some tafseers also, whereas the Qur'an completely refutes that idea. We find that the Qur'an talks about Adam and Eve *both* as sinners, equal in their sin and disobedience to God; it is neither the fault of Eve to bring Adam to earth, nor the fault of Adam alone, but the fault of *both*.

The Arabic language has three grammatical cases, singular, dual, and plural, as opposed to singular and plural in all other languages. Therefore, two persons, in the Arabic language, are not referred to in the plural form, but in the *dual* form. When the Qur'an talks about the story of Adam and Eve, it talks, throughout, in the dual form. I am going to analyze those verses for you to show you the essence of the Qur'an and Islam, and to show you that we, the Muslims, sometimes, say and do things that are totally contradictory to the rules of Islam. [Imam quotes Arabic verse and emphasizes the dual grammar:]

"O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in this garden and eat – both of you *fa ku**laa***…Do not approach this one tree *la taqra**baa*** …Satan whispered unto the two *fa waswasa lahu**maa***… Satan swore unto them that he was their good friend *wa qāsamahu**maa***…Led them on *fa dhallāhu**maa***… Both of them ate from the tree *fa aka**laa** minha…*" See how it talks about the *two* as sinners, no one lured the other. They repented and God forgave the two *fa tāba 'alayhi**maa***. The Qur'an talks throughout in the dual. It means it is not the fault of Eve alone, it is not the fault of Adam alone, but it is the fault of the *two*. They made the mistake together and they were forgiven together and, as a result, both of them came to earth together *ihbi**taa*** – in dual form. If it were Adam alone, or Eve alone, it would have said *ihbit*, and if it were in the plural, it would have said *ihbitū*. But it talks in the language of the *two*.

According to the Christian story of the creation of Adam and Eve, Adam lost one of his ribs because Eve was created from his 24th rib. That is nonsense, because if you take a man to the anatomy department of the Medical College of Ohio[10] to be examined, you should find a rib missing, which is not the case. If we look at the story of the creation of Adam and Eve in the Qur'an, we find it completely different. [Imam quotes 4:1 and explains:] Both of them were created from the *same Nafs*. The word *Nafs* is taken from *nafas* which is indicative of life – *hayāt*. After Adam was created, he was lonely; was a poor guy. He looked for someone to meet, to brighten his life, because everything is created in pairs, and he was one. The sociologists of nowadays call the relationship between man and

[7] Speaking in an urgent whisper

[8] Sacrifice

[9] 5:27-31

[10] In the year 2006, the Medical College of Ohio became the Medical University of Ohio and merged with the University of Toledo.

woman a relationship of complementarity. So, God created Eve, and according to that verse [4:1], God created her from the same "*Nafs*"/Soul. That is the status of equality between man and woman since the *creation* of Man. Therefore, the idea of Adam (man) being superior to Eve (woman) does not have its origin in Islam, or in the Qur'an, but has come from somewhere else, because in the Qur'an the story of the creation of Adam and Eve is different from what we read in Christianity and in Judaism. And yet, we, Muslims, are accused of treating women as second-class citizens and oppressing them. But we have to distinguish between the rules of the faith, and the people who are carrying them out. Islam is one thing and a Muslim is something else. There are a lot of men who do not follow the rules of Islam as they should be. Sometimes, the non-Muslims take advantage of this anomaly, and say *Islam* tells them to do that. But, if we compare the realities of life, the statistics of America tell us that there are over one million women who are abused by their husbands every year. Did Christianity tell them to do that? There is a difference between religion, and the people who belong to that religion. [The English translation of the verse related to the creation of man and woman, as quoted by Imam earlier, is:]

"O Mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity (*Nafs*[11]), and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women…" [4:1].

I think I mentioned this to you before, that in Arabic language, when one would like to describe a man as generous one says: *fulanun jabān-al kalb*. It sounds as if you are insulting him. *Jabān-al kalb* means, literally, "his dog is covered", but it actually means, "the man is generous". How do the Arabs understand this expression? They say, because visitors and guests are going in and out of his house so frequently, his dog does not bark at strangers any more, so, "his dog has become covered". That is an idiomatic expression. When you take it literally, it appears as if you are insulting the person, when, in fact, you are praising him. These kinds of linguistic nuances are extremely important when translating or explaining the Qur'an.

In Arabic language we differentiate between males and females by calling a man Ali, and a woman Aliyah. We add *taa'* (ة) at the end which they call "the female *taa'*."[12] Hameed *wa* Hameeda. The Arabic words *zawj* (زَوْجٍ) and *zawja* (زَوْجَة) are translated as "husband" and "wife" respectively. The plural is *azwaaj* for *zawj*, and *zawjaat* for *zawja*. But the Qur'an sometimes uses the male noun for the female. For example: [Imam quotes 4:1] وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا and created from it (*Nafs*) *his* mate, it does not say *wa khalaqa minha zawja**ta**ha*. This is a case of using the male gender to express for female.

When it comes to the plural form, we have an example of سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا not *zawjaat* – Glory to Him who created everything in pairs.[13] So this means it includes *both males and females*. Therefore, when translating, or explaining the Qur'an, it is very important to know what the Qur'an means by a certain word. You cannot just take the literal meaning of a word and say, that is what the Qur'an said, because the Qur'an uses metaphorical language extensively.

A girl came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, – and you can find this in the Hanafi school of jurisprudence – and said to him: "Prophet, my father wants me to marry my cousin, but I don't love him." The Prophet advised her to fulfill the wish of her father. She repeated that she did not love her cousin. But he urged her again to obey her father. She said: "Prophet, *I don't love* my cousin!"
He said to her for the third time: "You girl, listen to your father."
She said: "Prophet, *I don't love him. Period.*"
He said to her: "Then, if that is what you think, go and marry whosoever you want."
Then the girl said: "Prophet, I love my cousin. And I am going to marry him, but I intended to teach my father a lesson that he should not poke his nose in the affairs of his daughter."
You read this in the Hanafi School of jurisprudence. And what are we doing nowadays? Traditionally speaking, I remember the time when my sister was going to get married. Whenever the groom came to our house, my parents would imprison her in the barn, so the groom would not see her. It was forbidden for the two to see each other. And what is happening here, in America, nowadays? A girl is in college, sitting with Muslims and Christians, going to the mall and eating ice cream, with every Muslim and Christian man passing by, and there is no problem. But when she comes to the mosque, we have to imprison and isolate her. We say, "harām, harām[14] - the mixing between males and females." We are kidding ourselves.

[11] *Nafs* is variously translated as: soul, spirit, living entity, humankind, life essence…

[12] *taa'at-ta'neeth*

[13] 36:36

[14] That which is forbidden or sinful

Another thing amazed me last week. When I went to Egypt recently, I went via London, Ontario, where I found a group of Muslims, mainly Egyptians, who asked me to talk to them and their children on my way back from Egypt. I said, no problem; I will be in the city; arrange the talk and I'll be there. After I came back, on the second night, we had a meeting in the mosque, and we talked. They have a new imam there. The new imam. . . . His look – of course, I don't look like an imam myself, I admit it – he has a big beard, and he was wearing a white scarf on his head – I don't know what they call it. And, during the talk, someone asked a question about women, and this new imam "quoted" the Prophet as saying, "Consult with women, but don't act according to their advice." That is a "hadith" quoted by the shaykh. But, my question is, why consult with them if you are not going to give any consideration at all to their input? And is there nothing else in all of Bukhari and Muslim[15] except that hadith? This is what I mean when I say we talk about trifles, and waste time on these trifles.

There is a very big difference between Islam and Muslims. Muslims are not abiding by Islam in their judgments and actions, but truly, Islam, since the creation of the human being, talked about the equality of the two: "O Mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you from one Soul and from the same Soul created his mate." So they are created of the same Soul and *that denotes the equality since the start of life on this earth*. That's Islam. If Muslims are behaving differently, it is not a shortcoming of Islam, but it is the sin of Muslims. But what concerns us more here is that while Muslims are always criticized and publicized in the mass media, Muslims have no means to publicize the prevailing ignorance of Christianity and the West when they were learning from the Muslims; that is something which we have to be aware of. We have a very important point of argument: all the sciences that were translated into European languages were originally invented, made, or developed by Arabs, and even now, some carry the original Arabic name, albeit corrupted, like *al-jabr*[16] and *musiqa*.[17]

[15] The two most authoritative texts of hadith

[16] Algebra

[17] Music

The Status of Woman in Islam: Is Woman Equal to Man or Not?

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[Part 2 of 6]

Witness Equality

In the talk last week, by Sister Yasmeen Shaikh, another issue was raised, and that was regarding court testimony, and the number and gender of the witnesses: "Two men, or, one man and two women witnesses."

That is an inequality. And Sister Yasmeen Shaikh asked a very interesting question: "If we cannot find two men, then, can we have four women to testify?" That is a good question. It did not occur to me, but it makes me wonder where all the men could disappear? However, there is no mention in the Qur'an about having four women if there are no men, so I don't know how to answer that question.

Let me repeat that the stipulation of one male versus two female witnesses is mentioned in ONLY *one verse* in the Qur'an, and that verse has to do with, what we call nowadays, the banking system – finance. There was no banking at that time, but it was lending, borrowing and repaying between individuals.

I studied Fiqh or Islamic Law since I was in grade 1 in Al- Azhar, and continued for 10 years studying Islamic schools of thought. And, whenever we went to court,[18] I found that they applied that principle[19] to the rendition of *every kind of testimony*, while the Qur'an mentioned that requirement in the area of lending/borrowing of money *only*. I don't know why, in Egypt, this principle is applied to *everything*. The people have interpreted this as being applicable to every testimony, whether it is related to finance or not. How this came into existence, I don't know. As a result, our brothers, nowadays, say, "Yeah, because the man is equal to two women."

The Qur'an says: Have two men witnesses, or one man and two women أَن تَضِلَّ إِحْدَاهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا الأُخْرَى , which means, "*so that if one of them should forget the other could remind her*."[20] The last part of this sentence is invariably ignored; it is never quoted whenever that verse comes up for discussion. Nowadays, in some interpretations of the Qur'an, you will find some strange justifications for that: they say, the man has no monthly period like the woman; during her menstrual period she is sick; it is a sort of sickness, so she will not be in the mood, as a result, she may forget. The other woman may not be in her cycle, so she will remind her. That is some justification put forth

[18] As part of the educational requirement of Al-Azhar University

[19] "Two men, or one man and two women, witnesses"

[20] 2:282: "Have two men witnesses, or one man and two women *so that if one of them should forget the other could remind her*"

by our ulama of nowadays who have tried to "modernize" Islam a little bit.

Personally, I have a different opinion. I say, this verse was revealed for a specific time. At that time, women were not educated in the field of marketing and business. They lacked experience in trading and commerce. So, they required two women to back up each other. But, nowadays, are you going to tell me that the girl on CNN, who gives us the business news from all over the world, and tells us where the economy is headed, when the recession will end, when inflation will go up, what the current interest rate is, what the Fed is doing to remedy that situation, and she analyzes for you the economy of all the world in 10 minutes – are you going to tell me that she cannot testify in court, but Mr. Abdus-Samad of my village, who never went to school and who cannot read or write his name, will be more acceptable when it comes to giving testimony just because he is a man? It doesn't make sense. Then, that Islam needs change. If that will be our justification, if we say, yes, that is what was revealed, then, it's better to put the Qur'an on a tape recorder; put the whole Qur'an on a tape recorder and just play it; it will repeat it better than you and will never make a mistake. But, the difference is that you read and think, while the tape recorder does not think. So, if you don't use your brains, it is better to take our brains and throw them in the sea, because these brains are here to think for every time and for every place, to see what suits the present time and place. If you stop using your brain to think, then, you are useless: let us go to a psychiatric hospital for treatment.

Some will accuse Shaykh Khattab of changing the Qur'an. I would say to them that I am from the same family as Omar bin Khattab. Omar bin Khattab is my ancestral grandfather, and he changed the Qur'an, and as his descendant, I am following his lead.[21] Omar bin Khattab set an example for us. I told you this before, and I am repeating it. The Qur'anic verse number 60 in Chapter at-Tawbah came to tell us where zakah money can be paid: وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ means, the new converts to Islam are entitled to one share of the zakah collection. That was practiced during the time of the Prophet, and during the time of AbuBakr as-Siddiq.[22] When Omar bin Khattab took over after the death of AbuBakr, he put a stop to that practice. His companions said to him: "But the Qur'an commands it." He said, "Yes, the Qur'an said it, but, this Qur'anic verse was revealed for a specific time, when Islam was weak, the number of Muslims was small, and people were encouraged by giving them zakah to come and listen to Islam and be convinced. But, nowadays, we are great in number, we are a very big empire, we don't need anyone who is coming into the fold of Islam just for the sake of money. As a result, I'll never pay zakah to those people." My grandfather stopped that; changed the Qur'an! Why can't we change the requirement regarding the number of witnesses, nowadays, by saying that this verse was for that specific time when the women were not well-versed in the area of trading and business? Today, we have a different situation where a choice has to be made between the female commentator on television, well-versed in finance, and that person who cannot read or write, and that is what we have to account for. And, as I said many times before, the Qur'an and the hadith are not static, but *dynamic*; they can, and should move with time and place. We cannot afford to stagnate by sticking with the past and forgetting the advancements in education, knowledge, and technology.

Nowadays, if you want to go to Hajj,[23] a man will get a visa immediately, but the woman will be asked the question: "Where is your *mahram*?" She has to have a *mahram* with her. Mahram means a man who falls in the prohibited categories of marriage for her. And I admit that the requirement was valid at a certain time in the past, but not today. If I had my way in Saudi Arabia, I would abolish that requirement. Why, what is my reason?

My father went to Hajj in the year 1956. I was a student in high school at the time. And it was a very difficult, dreadful journey, as he described it to me. For the portion of the journey in Egypt, I was with him. First, we traveled by bus from our village to Cairo, then, by train from Cairo to Suez. Then, he took a ship from Suez to Jeddah. Finally, he took a camel from Jeddah to Makkah, and then, again, a camel from Makkah to Madinah. He traveled for weeks and weeks with only a little bit of money in his pocket. My mother made cookies and nice bread for him, and he took his supplies with him, because it would take him two months before he returned. So, he explained to me how hard the journey was: there were no highways, no asphalted roads, camels being the only mode of transportation in the desert. Pilgrims would spend days and nights riding on the backs of camels, sometimes staying in caravanserais here and there before arriving in Madīnah. It is

[21] Imam is laughing under his breath

[22] The first caliph after the Prophet; he reigned for 2 years

[23] The pilgrimage, requiring travel to Makkah, Saudi Arabia

almost three hundred miles between Makkah and Madinah; imagine how long it will take by camel. On the way, there were thieves and robbers. They waited for the pilgrims on the road, stole their money, and kidnapped the women, and this was in the 1950s. Now imagine what it must have been like if we go back 1000 years more. It was even more terrible! So, at that time, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "A woman cannot travel unless she has a mahram with her." Now, we are applying that hadith in the age of jet aircraft. How long does it take to fly between Makkah and Madinah? Half an hour by aeroplane. And, even if you travel by bus, it will be six to eight hours. Nowadays, there is no danger. And when the woman is aboard an aircraft she is with 400 people, male and female. Why are you scared for her? What is the point in asking a woman to have a mahram to protect her? She is already protected; the new technology is protecting her. The new technology has shortened the distance, and made it easier and safer. Distances we used to travel in a month, we now cover in hours, and in comfort. That idea of the mahram is something I cannot accept. A lot of people will say Shaykh Khattab *kafar*.[24] I agree with that.

In all the verses of the Qur'an, there is no other verse, except this one, that talks about the number of witnesses as "two men, or one man and two women". And if we take it in its context, we find that it is related to finance: O you who believe, if you are borrowing or getting a loan from someone for a certain period of time then write it – in a promissory note – according to our new terminology. It is not the borrower, or the one who is lending the money, that is to write the promissory note, but a third party that is neutral. The verse indicates that the Qur'an was talking to people whose education was limited because it says, let a writer write your case with justice; God granted him the ability to read and write so let him not deny those who are in need of his service; if you are asked to write, then help them and write that note for them.

See the precision of the Qur'an. Normally, the biggest testimony before a court is admission. The verse continues to say that the one who is in debt or, the one who is borrowing the money is to dictate to the writer. Why is that? Because, when he dictates, it will be a sort of acknowledgement, or admission, that he owes that amount of money, and in jurisprudence, and under the law in general, admitting to whatever is the biggest proof. If you go before a court and say you killed that person, then, that is the highest proof. You don't need witnesses; you don't need anything. So, by dictating to the writer, the borrower is admitting that he owes that money, and that is the highest type of proof. But it is the nature of human beings that they love money. So the verse continues to say, *yāʿnī*,[25] don't be borrowing or receiving $1000.00, and when you dictate, say, "I, Mr. So-and-So, borrowed $500.00 from Mr. So-and-So." وَلاَ يَبْخَسْ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا This is called *bakhs* in Arabic. When the Qur'an mentioned how Sayyidna Yusuf[26] was sold in Egypt as a slave, it says, بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ – they sold him for a paltry price – a few dirhams. So the word *yab-khas* is the verb from *bakhs*, and it means, state the true amount which you have borrowed and don't play some games when you are dictating. The borrower should fear God in what he is dictating and not give false information about the loan.

Then the Qur'an makes an exception and says that if the one borrowing the money is weak, uneducated, or mentally disturbed, and he cannot dictate, then let his guardian or the administrator of his estate, dictate on his behalf. This verse is recommending – some ulama of Islam say, "imposing" – that all these details are to be observed when there is borrowing of money which is to be repaid at a fixed time - إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى .

The next part of the verse is controversial among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Westerners are spanking the Muslims for that, and the Muslims, sometimes, cannot defend themselves because that is exactly what they hear from some ulama,[27] so they believe it. But, the Qur'an is simple, and like clay: it is shapeable in every time, and in every place, according to the circumstances. When you write that promissory note, there must be some witnesses to sign it, just as when you write a contract, or get married, there must be some witnesses. The Qur'anic verse[28] states: *call upon two of your men to act as witnesses; and if two men are not available, then a man and two women from among such as are acceptable to you as witnesses, so that if one of them should make a mistake, the other could remind her*. Beautiful. So, you have to have two witnesses: two men, if available, otherwise, one man and two women.

"*Two men, or one man and two women*" – <u>that</u> is the only part of this verse that stands out for Muslims now. Whenever

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24 Disbeliever

25 An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English, and means, loosely, "I mean" or, "you know" or, "in other words" depending on the context

26 The Prophet Joseph

27 Religious scholars

28 2:282

there is a witnessing we say "two men, or one man and two women". And the Westerners read it the same way, and say one man is equal to two women in Islam. But, again, I am going to repeat, this is the only verse in the Qur'an which talked about one man and two women; it does not exist anywhere else in the Qur'an except in that verse. And you know, we, the Muslims, are very expert when we come to these controversial verses; we read part of them and we don't complete them. *Yā'nī*, we say: "Marry any woman you want – one, two, three, or four. You can marry four." But, by saying that, we ignore half the verse. We do not read the verse from the beginning which says that "*IF you are scared that you will not be just or fair to the orphans, THEN marry two, three, or four*... So, there is a condition. But we don't read that condition. We say, oh, we are allowed four. No. We are allowed four *only* if the condition can be met. And the West is playing on this, also. Moreover, what is the reason for that Qur'anic verse which says that if you are scared that you will not be fair to the orphans then marry two, three, or four...? At the start of Islam, there were battles to be fought to defend the Message. Many Muslims died, and they were the sole earners of living for their families. At that time the Muslim government was not as organized as it should be, because it was a very new system, so they depended on one another to care for the orphans who lost their fathers. If a man had orphans as his neighbors, he took care of their needs for food and clothes. As long as the community was small it was like one family, but when a community grows, problems emerge. That is exactly what happened with the Muslim community. The gossip started. When a man, out of the goodness of his heart, entered a house to deliver food and clothing to the orphans, some individuals would start questioning, "How come that man is going to that house, and there is no man in the house? What he is doing there?" So everyone refrained because their motives were questioned. No one wanted people to talk about them and cast doubts and suspicion regarding their intentions. The result was that help for orphans dried up. So the Qur'anic verse came to say that if you are scared that you will not be fair to those orphans marry their mother. That was a remedy; a solution for a problem. It is not a rule, or a license, as it has been assumed, at present. These days the situation is different: whenever a man meets a woman with eyes bluer than those of his wife, he says, "Let us go to the shaykh." In the past, the second marriage was for a valid reason, and it was an exception not the rule. And note, the Bible does not contain any verse that prohibits marriage with more than one wife. The Torah has no verse which prohibits the Jews from marrying more than one wife. The grandfather of the Jews – Sayyidna Dāwūd,[29] who is the father of Sulaymān[30] – married 99 wives. Eh! You read it in Chapter Saad. It says he had 99 wives, and he wanted to marry the wife of his brother also; he wanted his brother to divorce her, so he could marry her. But the Qur'an – it is the only Book of revelation from God – explicitly stating "one woman to one man". That's the opposite of what *everybody* understands – Muslims and non-Muslims. The Qur'an says, even under less than desirable circumstances where you cannot establish justice for orphans and you marry more than one wife – even under those circumstances – you have to strive for equality between your wives and "*If you cannot make equality marry only one*." The word *ONE is mentioned*. And another Qur'anic verse goes so far as to say, "And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it...." [31] But how did the Prophet marry all those wives? Did he maintain equality? No. He was not able to. He used to love 'Aiysha more, because she was a young girl and needed more care and, as a result, he used to say, "God, I have made every effort to make equality among them, but please don't take me to task for that over which I have no control." And he meant the love, the love in his heart, because he loved 'Aiysha more. That is the only problem he had. The equality in the material affairs was okay. But he used to be more inclined to her in his heart, more deferential to her, so he used to seek God's forgiveness for that, for something beyond his ability.

When we analyze the subject of "four wives" we find that Islam said "one man to one woman". *That is the rule*. Anything other than that is wrong, but there are some exceptions. What are the exceptions? An exception is a case which is not typical or usual. For example, the goal of marriage is mainly procreation and maintaining the generations. The children – they are the delight of the eyes of the parents. However, if a woman is barren, or, if the medical professionals declare that she will never have children, then that man has some defect in his marriage. Here, Islam says, that is a bad circumstance; it could be rectified by him marrying another wife, but the first wife is his responsibility also. Don't throw her in the street. Some people ask what options are available if the problem is with the man, and the woman is very fertile. Can she marry two husbands? A lot of people ask that question. The

[29] The Prophet David
[30] King Solomon
[31] 4:129

answer is no. But there is another remedy. Islam gives her the right to divorce instantly. She can remarry to fulfill her desire of having children. Why does Islam not allow her to marry two husbands? Logic. And that logic is based upon the nature of man and the nature of woman. Imagine, she has a child now; then, both husbands will claim to be the father and the argument will start.

The topic of "four wives" is always brought up by Western people, and sometimes we discuss it among ourselves, and mistakenly, we think that this is the rule in Islam and Islam allows it. No, Islam does not allow it. Islam makes it as a remedy for a certain situation which is abnormal. But in normal circumstances, one man to one woman. And the word ONE is mentioned only in the Qur'an and not in any other revelation. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

"If you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among [other] women such as are lawful to you – two, three, or four: but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness then [only] *one* – or [from among] those whom you rightfully possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course" [4:3].

Now, in the case of testimony, suppose that the first woman did not forget, then, we don't need the second. If the first woman does not forget, the judge will accept the testimony of one man and one woman. But we do not read that; we say فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتَانِ (one man and two women). And in our books of Fiqh, you find that they extend this requirement to every type of contract – not just a financial contract.

Why is this verse the only one in which this recommendation is made? There is a reason why two women are recommended. The reason is that we are in the context of a financial deed. And when I explain these Qur'anic verses that way, sometimes, it appears to some people exactly opposite to what they are familiar with, and it appears like *kufr*[32] to them. But, in fact, let us use logic. Let us go back to the history. At the time of the Prophet, women had no knowledge or experience at all about finance, trading, and business. As a proof for that, we know that Khadija bint-Khuwaylid hired Muhammad, *'alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*,[33] to invest her money for her. That's what history tells us. It means that Khadija, who was a rich businesswoman, could not function in that field, nor invest her money herself. So she hired Muhammad to manage her business for her.

[32] Denial of the rules of God

[33] Upon him be prayers and peace

What is the difference between a man and a woman? They have the same faculties, they have the same brain, and the article of thinking is implanted in both of them. There are some psychological differences which they talk about today, that the woman is more emotional than the man, but this will not affect her faculty of thinking. The night before last, I was watching, on television, a debate about the United States budget. A Congresswoman, who is working on the budget committee, was discussing the financial and economic affairs of the world. I started to think, how could the testimony of this woman, who is preparing a budget for the richest country on earth, be half that of my uncle Ibrahim Abu Rib', who cannot distinguish the letter *alif* from the corn on the cob, *ONLY* because he is a man? Personally, I question it. Someone would like to say – and a lot of people have said that; I hear it frequently now – "O, Khattab would like to change the Qur'an," but the difference between me and the people is that God created for me a little bit here and I use it.[34] Is there anybody who can say to me that this woman [the Congresswoman on the budget committee of the United States] is not fit, and we have to have two like her to be equal to that man of my village? If this is our thinking then *Allah yarhamna yarhamu-Islam*.[35] [Long pause by Imam, and dead silence in the audience.]

These thoughts, sometimes, work in my head. It is the *ability*; it is the *capacity* to think… [Abruptly Imam brings the sermon to an end, resisting the temptation to continue.] I'll call upon Amjad.[36]

[Amjad – coming to the *mimbar* and pointing at Imam, says:] "*His ijtehad*."[37]

Imam: "Used his brain, that's all. And "Anyone who makes *ijtehad* and happens to be wrong will have one *thawab* (reward). But, if he turns out right, he will have two rewards." That's what the Prophet said. So, he is winning anyway.

Amjad: "Thank you Imam."

[34] Pointing to his head, provoking laughter and clapping in the audience

[35] Allah have mercy on us; have mercy on Islam. This invocation is used almost exclusively for the deceased, thus implying that such thinking is the death-knoll for Islam and the Muslims

[36] He is the president, and has announcements for the audience. The audience is laughing gleefully, and Imam is laughing also.

[37] A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

The Status of Woman in Islam: Is Woman Equal to Man or Not?

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 3 of 6]

Inheritance Equality

[Verses 4:7, 11 and 12]

"For males a share of what they earn and for females a share of what they earn…" [38]

"Yes, but how much?"

"I'll come to the "how much" *ya* Dr. Mansoor, I'll come to this point. See…. [39] Let me elaborate, right now, to answer Dr. Mansoor.

Westerners, also, never tire of saying that you people are always talking about equality between males and females in Islam, but how come the woman has half the share of a man in inheritance? "Is that equality?" That is a question we are always asked. The fact is that we cannot appreciate one verse of the Qur'an by itself, we cannot judge by one verse, or one chapter, in the Qur'an. *Islam is a total law.* And you have to deal with it in its totality. As always, we pick up selectively on that particular part of the verse which says, "The son inherits two shares and the daughter inherits one share," and we interpret this to mean that "one man equals two women". But even this *entire* verse cannot be understood in the proper context if it is considered apart, and separate, from the rest of the Qur'an, let alone this *part* of the verse which is commonly quoted separately. [It would be useful to quote the English translation of the relevant verses here to put them in perspective:]

" Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, whether it be little or much – a share ordained by God" [4:7].

"Concerning the inheritance of your children, God enjoins this upon you: The male shall have the equal of two females' share; but if there are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what their parents leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half thereof. And as for the parents of the deceased, each of them shall have one-sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of his having left a child; but if he has left no child and his parents are his only heirs, then his mother shall have one-third; and if he has brothers and sisters, then his mother shall have one-sixth after the deduction of any bequest he may have made, and any debt he may have incurred. As for your

38 Before Imam could finish his sentence he was interrupted by a member of the audience

39 Imam changes his mind and decides to address Dr. Mansoor's query instead

parents and your children – you know not which of them is more deserving of benefit from you: therefore this ordinance from God. Verily, God is all-knowing, all-wise" [4:11].

"And you shall inherit one-half of what your wives leave behind, provided they have left no child; but if they have left a child, then you shall have one-quarter of what they leave behind, after the deduction of any bequest they may have made, or any debt they may have incurred. And your widows shall have one quarter of what you leave behind, provided you have left no child; but if you have left a child, then they shall have one-eighth of what you leave behind, after the deduction of any bequest you may have made, or any debt you may have incurred. And if a man or a woman has no heir in the direct line, but has a brother or a sister, then each of these two shall inherit one-sixth; but if there are more than two, then they shall share in one-third of the inheritance, after the deduction of any bequest that may have been made, or any debt that may have been incurred, neither of which having been intended to harm the heirs. This is an injunction from God: and God is all-knowing, forbearing" [4:12].

Why do we focus only on "the male shall have the equal of two females' share"? We conveniently forget that we are reading only part of the verse. If we read the rest of the verse we find things are different: if the deceased is survived by a father and mother, the father inherits 1/6 of the estate and the mother inherits 1/6: that is equality, although one is male and one is female. The Qur'an did not say that the father should take two shares and the mother should take one share. The Qur'anic verse says *abawai* – it means his "parents" – father and mother – get one-sixth each. That makes us think, and it shows us that when we read the Qur'an we have to understand it in its totality; we cannot come to one specific verse and say that is what the Qur'an said. There are even some cases in which the mother will inherit more than the father. But, in focusing selectively on certain parts of Qur'anic verses, we follow the Westerners who are trying to discredit Islam, and we, thereby, help them in this respect. When we discuss a certain verse, or subject, we have to take it as a whole, and not just one part of it.

It is very well-known in Islam that the woman is the responsibility of her father before her marriage. She is the responsibility of her husband after her marriage. She is the responsibility of her father or brother, if she is divorced. If she is working – as we see women working nowadays – she is not obligated to spend her money: that is Islam. If *she* volunteers to spend it, it is her prerogative. And, the Qur'an, even when it comes to the *mahar*,[40] says it is up to the women, if they volunteer to give you a part of their dowry, then it is halal[41] for you to use it, but it is at her sole discretion. So, in the same manner, if she is working and making her own wages or money or wealth, she is not obligated to spend it and her maintenance is still the responsibility of her husband. If she is in need, and her husband abandoned her, she is the responsibility of her brother. When she becomes old she is the responsibility of her children. All these are responsibilities.

Let us examine the situation as it exists nowadays. Who takes care of his sister in this manner? If your sister was married, and later abandoned or divorced by her husband, and she came to your house, and you welcomed her as a guest, but after three days, you kicked her out, then, you did not fulfill your responsibilities. The reason Islam gave the man two shares is because he is responsible for the females. Nowadays, he does not fulfill his responsibilities. As a result, this question of shares should be put to the big scholars to study, because people change with time and with place.

If the deceased left behind two daughters and there is no boy, they will get two-thirds of the estate, and the remaining one-third will be divided among the rest of the male inheritors. And suppose there are ten of them, then how much will the share of each male be in comparison to the two girls? The fact is that when Islam distributes the inheritance, it does not consider sex as a basis for the shares.

If the deceased has brothers – say two – and he also has one daughter, then, that one daughter will inherit one half of the estate while her uncles will share the other half assuming that they are the only other eligible heirs. So here we have males and females and the shares are not 2:1. When Islam gives rights, it attaches responsibilities to them. If we compare the rights and the responsibilities of the brothers and the sisters, we find that the sister, upon final analysis, is better off than her brother. That is because "the men are the guardians of the women".[42] What is the meaning of this verse? What is the meaning of "guardianship"? It means that *the husband is fully responsible for the maintenance of his family financially*.

When we were students, we were given mathematical problems involving division of assets among inheritors, such as: a man died leaving behind him a wife and daughter, a sister, three

[40] Dowry
[41] Lawful
[42] 4:34

brothers, and so on, and he left a certain amount of money and land. It was a very, very thorny, and difficult topic for us. The Qur'an classifies one group of heirs as *ashab-ul furud*. These are the people for whom God has assigned a certain percentage of the inheritance. You cannot change it. Then, there is another class of heirs termed *al-'asabaat*. *Al-'asabaat* are people from your *'asab* (from your blood) – meaning your children. After *ashab-ul furud* take their percentage, the remainder will be divided among the *'asabaat* – two shares for the boy, and one share for the girl. Then there is the case of *al-hajb*. *Hujibu minal meerath* means "forbidden" or taken out of the estate – they have no share – and that is a very extensive science in itself. When you study the science of inheritance as a whole, there are many different cases. That expression, "the woman has one share, and man has two shares," which people normally use, is wrong. It is not that way. A more correct expression would be, "the *son* has two shares and the *daughter* has one share," because the mother is a woman, and the father is a man, and they inherit equal shares from their son. So our expression, linguistically, is wrong when we say "the male takes twice as much as the female" because this is not correct. There are cases where males and females take equal shares, so it is more appropriate to say the *son* has two shares and the *daughter* has one share.

Why does the son take two shares and the daughter one share? Let us look at Islam, in general, now – don't look at the issue of inheritance alone – and see what are the rights and the responsibilities assigned by Islam. Meeting the expenses and providing for the finances of the family is the responsibility of the man, even if the wife is a millionaire. And, as a result, if he has no money, don't marry him. Why put yourself in that predicament? That's what the Prophet said, "If you can afford marriage go ahead, if you cannot, fast; this will keep your chastity." In the division of the estate between sons and daughters, the son is given two shares assuming that he is going to get married and will have to support his wife and children. The girl is going to marry another man who will fully support her, so her share, which she inherited, will go to the bank – to the savings account. So, she is in a better position than her brother, financially speaking. Some people now, here, will say, but this is not happening in Pakistan, and this is not happening in Egypt, and this is not happening in Lebanon. I agree. It is not happening because the Muslims are crooks. However, don't condemn Islam. Condemn the Muslims. If we abide by the rules of Islam, there will be no troubles and no problems. But the problem is we don't. You know, my father did it, also. When he was going to Hajj, he wrote his will in which he gave away all, or most, of his estate to the boys, and gave me a better share because I was the youngest, not married yet, and still having some education left to complete; so he gave me an additional amount. And when he handed me the paper, written with the help of the mayor of the city, and I read it, I asked him, what is that? He said, "God knows, maybe I'll come back, or I'll not come back…" I said to him yes, suppose that you will not come back, what is that paper for? He said, "So you can manage." So I tore the paper into pieces and I said to him, "I am a man. I could be a farmer; I could work on any farm, but *my sister*,[43] if her husband throws her out in the street, what can she do to earn her living?" It made sense to him, and the will was destroyed. So it happened in our house, too.

In Pakistan it is "harām" for the girl to have a share in the estate of her father: she married outside the family, so they don't like the estate of Mr. Ali to go to Mr. Ibrahīm. In Lebanon, some people convert from Sunni to Shi'i because they can play with that inheritance business, although, *they have the same Qur'an!* I don't know where they get these ideas. But that is the exploitation by Muslims; it has nothing to do with Islam. Islam is a religion of justice.

[43] It is worth hearing Imam's tone of voice as he utters the words "my sister"

The Status of Woman in Islam: Is Woman Equal to Man or Not?

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 4 of 6]

Dress

One of the examples put forth by Sister Yasmeen Shaikh, in her talk about the status of women in Islam, referred to the "dress code" and the tendency of people to qualify it by the attribute "Islamic" before it. What is the "Islamic dress"? Is it the Arab *gallabiya*? Is it the Pakistani *shalwar* and *qamees*? Is it the American pantaloon and blouse with a scarf?

There is no such thing as an "Islamic" dress. But, what Islam requires is for one to be covered modestly. But what is modesty? Irrespective of the dress that some women are attired in, what is called hijab[44] still looks very, very attractive – and will turn heads even from ten miles away. So how should a woman or a man dress such that they will not draw the attention of the opposite sex? It is not the dress *alone* that will act as a barrier to the attraction between the two sexes; it is something in addition to it. Talking to a member of the opposite sex will not in and of itself cause attraction between them, but the manner of talking can cause that attraction. The Qur'an advises the wives of the Prophet about talking to foreign men in a language that is considered polite – *bil-ma'ruf* – but not in a soft, or singsong, or seductive voice. In the same manner, even if a woman is attired in hijab, but her behavior and manners do not conform to Islamic mores, the dress will not do anything to prevent the attraction of the opposite sex. Islam recommends a middle course in everything. The Qur'an says, "We have made you a nation in the middle." Follow the middle way; don't be too far to the right, or too far to the left. 'Aiysha, *radia-Allahu 'anhā*, said, "I used to see the perfume shining in the partition of his hair," referring to the Prophet. Nowadays, our brothers quote a "hadith" which, according to them, says, "The angels will curse, day and night, any woman wearing perfume that can be smelled by someone passing by." But, what about a man who is wearing perfume? Is it legitimate for him, but not for her? Is the Qur'an biased in favor of men?

There are words in the Qur'an that people interpret according to their mentality, or according to their need and inclination, or the thing which they are looking for. An example is the verses talking about *zeenah:*

وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ ...Not to show *their zeenah* (زِينَتَهُنَّ) except to their husbands. [The following is the translation of the verse Imam is referring to:]

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms in public beyond what may decently be apparent thereof; hence let

[44] Traditional Arab head-covering such that not one single hair is visible

them draw their head coverings over their bosoms. And let them not display more of *their charms* (زِينَتَهُنَّ) to any but their husbands.... And let them not strike [or swing] their legs so as to draw attention to their hidden charms" [24:31].

So what is the *zeenah* which a woman is not supposed to show, except to her husband? Some people claim that earrings and bracelets constitute *zeenah*. *Tayyab!*[45] In that case, then, how can we reconcile the above verse with another verse in the Qur'an, which says, "O children of Adam! Take your *zeenah* to the mosque for every act of worship."[46] How can we reconcile these two verses? Was this latter verse revealed for the benefit of men only? Is the Qur'an talking to men only when it advises us to take *zeenah* to the mosque for every act of worship, or, is it talking to both men and women? These are the questions which need to be asked. And when someone talks to us about *zeenah*, we have to know what *zeenah* is.

Zeenah, in our normal understanding, includes items such as going to a barber for getting a haircut, trimming or shaving one's beard, and the like; in short, paying attention to personal grooming and appearance. Take any Arabic word and look up its meaning in Lisan-ul Arab[47] and you will find that it has twenty meanings. So *zeenah* has many different meanings, and it is time for us to understand Islam on its terms. We have the heritage in the Qur'an, and we have to supplement it with the sunnah or the authentic hadith. And, when we interpret the hadith, the interpretation must suit our time and our environment, and not just be a quote of what happened 1400 years ago. There are people in Egypt at this time [late 1990's] who maintain that if one has no *taqiyya*[48] and white *gallabiya*,[49] his prayer is not correct, because this dress[50] is the dress of the *kuffar*.[51] But the Prophet Adam was covered by the leaves of trees in heaven! What Islam requires is covering up, and Adam and Eve covered themselves with the leaves of the trees. That was their dress. It is not what your dress looks like, or what its shape is, because this differs from one place to another, and the weather plays a great role in it. Imagine if you are wearing *gallabiya* when the temperature is 30º F below zero; you will freeze to death. Imagine if you go to Saudi Arabia in July when the temperature soars to 150º F and you are wearing a very tight three-piece suit; you will melt! So there are many things that shape life other than religion, but that is the way we [mis]understand Islam. It is not everything that the Prophet did, or the *sahaba*[52] did, that we have to do, otherwise, as Ar-Rasūl,[53] *alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, said in his hadith: "I love two things in this world: dates and water." That's what he used to eat. Today, we buy a whole sheep and stuff it.[54] Why don't we follow the Prophet in this sunnah and subsist on dates and water? *That* is sunnah. Just go to the Arab countries and see what they are eating there: you find food enough for an army on the table, and how many people will eat? Three people. And they claim to be Muslim, strictly following Islam. What Islam? There are people starving in Bosnia. There are Muslims starving in the Philippines, in Somalia, in Sudan, everywhere, and there are people throwing food in the garbage that will feed all those people. And they talk about Islam.

Islam is a sharing; Islam is a brotherhood; Islam is a co-operation. In Cleveland, there was a meeting of Muslim organizations wherein they expressed happiness at hearing a bit of news. What is the bit of news? "The mosque of Perrysburg is going bankrupt and the bank is going to take it over." So they were very happy. Thank God...[55] Is that the Islamic spirit? Assuming the information was correct, then, the proper action would be to extend your hand to your brothers in their time of need. This is the house of God; it does not belong to anyone. But, brothers and sisters, we are far away, far away from Islam. We are just claiming to be Muslims but we are very far. We need a lot of hard work to come back to our essentials and to our principles; and that is the only real thing to strive to do, and we pray that God guide us to do it. And we'll see you next week, *insha'allah*.

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45 Fine!
46 7:31
47 The name of a dictionary
48 The traditional Arab male head scarf
49 The traditional male Arab dress
50 Imam is pointing to his own clothes. He is wearing pants and blazer
51 The unbelievers/pagans

52 The Prophet's companions
53 The Messenger, a title of the Prophet Muhammad
54 A traditional Arab dish called *mansaf*
55 Imam talks in Arabic for a long time

The Status of Woman in Islam: Is Woman Equal to Man or Not?

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 5 of 6]

Women Prophets

Last Sunday someone came to me and said, "Imam, you have been talking for the last six or seven weeks on the subject of women. Considering that the Qur'an is full of verses that deal with, or mention women, if you are going to follow that pattern, you will be talking about women for the next two years. If you are going to talk next week about women, I'll not come." [56] I said to him, that's very good; if you don't come, stay home; what's wrong with that? You may find someone better to talk to you at home, better than listening to me here.

In connection with the subject of the status and equality of women in Islam, the question has been raised whether, in the history of mankind, there were any women prophets. Some people, who ask that question, ask why God always sent *anbiya*[57] from men. Why have we never heard of a woman *nabi*? [58] Is that discrimination on the basis of sex? Imam Al Qurtubi[59] maintains there is no discrimination, because God created human beings equal.

From the history of Islam we know that there were very pious women. If we look into the hadith we can sense the role of 'Aiysha bint AbuBakr and how great a part she played in educating males and females about how the Prophet lived his life, what he said and did, and how he conducted himself within his house. The Prophet himself said, pointing to 'Aiysha, "Take half of your religion from that woman."

History also tells us about Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyy,[60] a woman well-known for her piety. Her life story has been made into a movie depicting how she started as a singer, then the guidance of God came to her and she turned into a pious woman, and through her many people were guided. They refer to her as *Shaheed da-ul-'ishqil -ilahiya* – The Martyr of the Divine Love.

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[56] Imam laughs

[57] Prophets (plural)

[58] Prophet (singular)

[59] Imam Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, was born in Cordoba, Spain. He was an eminent Maliki scholar. His twenty-volume tafseer al Jami' li-ahkam al-Qar'an…. is famous. He settled in Munya Abi'l-Khusavb in Upper Egypt where he died in 671H/1273.

[60] 713-801 C.E.

When it comes to prophethood, Imam Al-Qurtubi asserts there are women who were prophets. How did he arrive at that conclusion? He said *nabi* is someone who receives inspiration or *wahy*. In Islam, that definition is applicable to men as well as to women, and there are women who were *anbiya* or *nabiyaat*.[61] Imam Al-Qurtubi talked about it thoroughly in his book Zaad-al-Maa'ad and he mentioned some of them. There is a distinction between *nabi* (prophet) and *rasūl* (messenger). Sometimes we use these terms interchangeably, but, in fact, they are not synonymous. Every messenger was a prophet, but not every prophet was a messenger. The definition of a prophet is "a person who received revelation from God". The definition of a messenger is "a person who received revelation from God and who was ordered by God to convey that message to the people". On the basis of this definition, Imam Al-Qurtubi says, yes, there are women prophets. When he was asked how come there have been women prophets and no one ever heard of them, he replied: "A prophet is one who received revelation or inspiration from God and the mother of Musa[62] received inspiration from God. The Qur'an talked about it: وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى أُمِّ مُوسَى – We inspired the mother of Moses: 'Suckle him for a time, and then, when thou hast cause to fear for him, cast him into the river…'" So, the mother of Moses is one of the *al-anbiya* because she received *wahy*; and this is according to the explanation of Imam Al Qurtubi given a long, long time ago – much before the creation of the women's liberation movement. We find the same terminology in reference to Yusuf[63] when he was thrown in the well by his brothers. The Qur'an says, وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ – We inspired him, We revealed to him, that one day he is going to tell his brothers about the mistake they made in their dealings with him. If Yusuf was a prophet because of that *wahy*, then the mother of Moses is a prophet because she received *wahy*. That is the reasoning behind the assertion of Imam Al-Qurtubi about women prophets.

[61] Plural of nabi, female gender

[62] Moses

[63] Joseph

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[Part 6 of 6]

Mention in the Qur'ān of Men and Women

Where ever you go in the Muslim world, and listen to the *khutba*[64] of Jum'ah[65] prayers, you will find that something about women is mentioned in the khutba just for the sake of… well, giving them some… *something*; they have to have their share and… *and always their share is a minus*.[66] What I would like to talk about today is the number of times women are mentioned in the Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an has given the woman her share of verses, exactly as it has given man his share. These verses were revealed to show that, like men, there are women who are pious and righteous and, like men, there are women who are corrupting on earth.

In the Qur'an are many verses describing good men, such as Nūh,[67] and how he suffered; how Muhammad suffered in his preaching of the faith; how Jesus suffered, and, on the other hand, verses describing wicked men, such as Pharaoh, and what he did to the people; what Abu Lahab did to Muhammad; Abu Jahl, and so on. Similarly, the Qur'an talks about women who were pious, and women, even wives of prophets, who were not Muslim; they were *kafir*;[68] they did not believe in the message of their husbands.

The Qur'an talks about women in every class of human beings. Pharaoh was a *kafir* and the Qur'an talks about his wife as *mo'minah* – a believer. We have verses in the Qur'an related to Yusuf [69] and the wife of the Aziz;[70] Sayyidna Sulayman[71] and Bilqees – the Queen of Sheba; we have a whole chapter entitled Maryam;[72] we have Hājar and Sārah, the two wives of Ibrahim;[73] the wife of Ayub[74] who lived with him in his sickness and poverty, and she was his right-hand. So, there are examples of good women and bad women exactly as the Qur'an talks about good men and bad men. The first woman created – Eve – has a

[64] Sermon
[65] Friday
[66] Imam utters in an emphatic whisper. He means, the woman is berated
[67] The Prophet Noah
[68] Unbelievers
[69] The Prophet Joseph
[70] The prime minister of Egypt
[71] The Prophet Solomon
[72] Mary
[73] The Prophet Abraham
[74] The Prophet Job

great share in the Qur'anic verses. She was not only created equal to Adam, but was treated on an equal footing with Adam in heaven as well as on earth.

The Qur'an talks about the two wives of Ibrahim – Sarah and Hajar. Sarah was the first wife, Hajar his second wife. The Qur'an brings out certain details in these stories to show us the human nature, and that all the prophets and their households were subject to the same laws governing human nature. The problem in the house of Ibrahim, as depicted in the Qur'an, illustrates the difficulties faced by a man married to two women. And let me tell you what Sheikh Hashim, a friend of mine with two wives, said to me one day. I said, "*Ya* Sheikh Hashim, I have one wife and she is giving me all the trouble in life. How are you managing with two?" He said, "*Ya* Shaykh Abdelmoneim, there was a man who married two, and a man who married four. The man who married two, and was getting trouble from them, went to the man who married four, for consultation, and to find out how he was managing four? His advice to him was, "Sleep between the two." So the guy slept between the two. One wife spanked him on his right, and the other spanked him on the left. In the morning he woke up with swollen flanks. So he went to the consultant and complained about the advice he had gotten. He asked him what had happened. He showed him his swollen sides. He said, "Hmm. I didn't mean this. I didn't mean for you to sleep between the two like that. I meant that you keep one in the Middle East, and one in America, and you sleep in Europe."

In the story of Ibrahim, *'alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, and his two wives, there is a point, which is sometimes alluded to, here, in America. I am sure that every one of you may have to deal with it whenever the story comes up in discussions with your non-Muslim acquaintances. There is a difference in narration of the story of Ibrahim by the Muslims on the one hand, and the Christians and Jews on the other. We know the story of Ibrahim that he offered to slaughter his son Ismā'il[75] as a *qurban*[76] for God. The Jews and the Christians say the son that was offered for sacrifice was Ishaaq – Isaac. So, which is which – which one was sacrificed? But there is a very, very easy way to know which one was offered for slaughter. Ismā'il was the elder son. And according to the Torah itself, and the New Testament, Ismā'il was 15 years old when Isaac was born. There is a very good chance that this was the boy who was very dear to his father as he was the only son, and whom God made the subject of the test for Ibrahim, to see how far he was willing to go in his obedience to God. Secondly, where was the location of this event? It was in 'Arafāt – the Arabian Peninsula, or the Saudi Arabia of nowadays. This lends support to the claim that it was Ismā'il, because he was living in this area. Isaac was living in Palestine. How did Ismā'il come to live in this area? It was the result of the human nature: even the wives of prophets were not immune to jealousy. When Hajar, the younger wife of Ibrahim, had the baby boy, Ismā'il, Sarah, his first wife, felt jealous, so she said to Ibrahīm: "Will you please take that woman and her son and put them somewhere else. I cannot live with them in one house." Ibrahim did not like to have trouble in his house. The order came to him through inspiration to take them to Makkah where there was no water, no plants, or vegetation; there was nothing. It was *pure* desert. And, also, there was no oil!

The Qur'an mentions two *kafir* women: the wife of Sayyidna Nūh[77] and the wife of Sayyidna Lūt.[78] The wife of Nūh was a corrupting influence on earth; she undermined her husband's work of preaching to the way of Allah. The Qur'an called her "kafira"; she was fighting her husband even in his mission for God.

At the time of Lūt, men were interested in men, and women were interested in women – homosexuality, as they call it. You know, Sayyidna Lūt and the homosexuals were in the area known, nowadays, as Jordan, so this is…. Looks to me like we, the Arabs, also taught people the practice of homosexuality. We are experts in everything. The wife of Sayyidna Lūt informed the homosexuals in town about the arrival of the angels, who came in the form of human beings as very handsome men, to warn Sayyidna Lūt about the impending destruction of the towns. The wife of the Prophet Lūt, I think, if she were living today, would be living in California. She used to, whenever she saw a very nice, handsome boy, inform the homosexuals and say, "Come on, there is a very nice boy here." She played a role in corrupting the society. On the contrary, we have Pharaoh who is described by the Qur'an as "he was arrogant even among inordinate transgressors" while his wife was a believer, and the Qur'an talks about her praying to God to save her from Pharaoh and his actions, and to build for her a house in jannah[79]. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

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[75] Ishmael
[76] Sacrifice
[77] The Prophet Noah
[78] The Prophet Lot.
[79] Paradise

"For those who are bent on denying the truth God has propounded a parable in the stories of Noah's wife and Lot's wife: they were wedded to two of Our righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband; and neither of the two husbands will be of any avail to these two women when they are told on Judgment Day, "Enter the fire with all those other sinners who enter it!" And for those who have attained to faith God has propounded the parable in the story of Pharaoh's wife as she prayed, "O my Sustainer! Build Thou for me a mansion in the paradise that is with Thee, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from all evildoing folk!" And We have propounded yet another parable of God-consciousness in the story of Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity, whereupon We breathed of Our spirit into that which was in her womb and who accepted the truth of her Sustainer's words – and thus, of His revelations – and was one of the truly devout" [66:10 – 12].

The Qur'an also talks about a woman in the field of love. It is explained very clearly in chapter Yusuf.[80]

Yusuf was a son of the Prophet Yaqoob – Jacob. His mother passed away while he was a little child. He and his brother, Binyāmīn, or Benjamin, were the children of one wife while the other ten children of Yaqoob were from another woman. Since the wife of Yaqoob, the mother of Yusuf and Benjamin, passed away during their childhood, the father gave them more care and attention and tried to make up for the care of mother and father at the same time. This created jealousy in the hearts of the other ten children, who questioned why their father gave special attention to Yusuf, in the first place, then to Benjamin, in the second place. That was crowned by a dream of Sayyidna Yusuf wherein he saw eleven stars, the sun, and the moon prostrating before him. And when he narrated that dream to his father, his father said this was a true dream and, insha'allah, God will perfect His bounties upon you as He perfected them before upon your forefathers, Ibrahim and Ishaaq. But Yaqoob, knowing the attitude of his other children towards Yusuf, advised him not to tell his brothers about his dream.

Plots and conspiracies have existed since that time. The ten children of Yaqoob held a meeting and everyone expressed his concern about their father giving more attention to Yusuf and resolved to do something, at least to draw the attention of the father to themselves. Everyone started to give suggestions. Someone suggested killing him. But the older brother reminded them that they were the children of a Prophet and, because killing was not permitted by religion, no one would accept that. He exhorted them to come up with some other alternative. Then he suggested throwing Yusuf into a well. Some passing caravan would fish him out when they got some water from the well, and maybe, they would take him away to some far away land thereby ending that chapter in their life: Yusuf would disappear and their father would direct his attention to the other brothers. The brothers accepted this great plan and decided to carry it out.

One day, the ten brothers went to their father and said that the sun is shining, the weather is beautiful today, and we are going out to the desert; why don't you send Yusuf with us to let him enjoy the good weather. So, as if Yaqoob put the words in their mouth and helped them in what they were going to do, he said, "I am scared that, if he went with you, and you get busy playing, the wolf will eat him. And that will make my life miserable." Unwittingly, he gave them the idea of what to do, or what to say, after they came back without Yusuf. And, because they insisted, he permitted them to take the child. They took him and threw him in the well, took his shirt and stained it with some colored thing, like blood, and returned in the evening crying, screaming that the wolf had eaten Yusuf, and as proof, produced his bloodstained shirt. That is exactly the basis for the Arabic saying: "He kills someone and then joins in his funeral"; that is exactly what had happened. And this story is narrated to the Prophet to show him how much one of the prior prophets suffered during his life and for the sake of the message with which he was entrusted.

Now, Yusuf is in the well. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

"And so, when they went away with him, they decided to cast him into the dark depths of the well. And we revealed this unto him: 'Thou wilt yet remind them of this their deed at a time when they shall not perceive who thou art.'" [81] That was the first experience for Yusuf to receive *al-wahy*.[82]

A caravan of camels and men came along and the chief of the tribe asked one of the men to bring some water from the well. He lowered his bucket into the well and a very nice, beautiful boy clung to the rope of the bucket as it was raised. Everyone was amazed to such an extent that the Qur'an

[80] Chapter 12

[81] 12:15

[82] Inspiration from God

expresses it this way: [83]"*Ya bushra* *hadha* *ghulam*" – *what a glad tiding we are receiving now! That is a beautiful boy!* وَأَسَرُّوهُ بِضَاعَةً – they considered him to be their own property. And all the while God is watching; knows what they are doing, and knows what is His own plan.

They decided to sell him in the slave market in Egypt. The prime minister of Egypt, or what they call *Al-Wazeer-ul-Akbar*, came and offered to buy the child. And whatever the price he paid for Yusuf, it was a very, very cheap price, as the Qur'an puts it – بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ . The prime minister told his wife to take care of the boy, feed him very well, educate him very well, and, maybe, he will be our son one day: if we have a child, then he will be a servant, but, if we don't have a child of our own, we will adopt him as our child. So Yusuf now lived in the house of the greatest man in Egypt. When he became a young man, his other troubles started.

Now we are talking about women in love. The wife of the prime minister felt love towards Yusuf, and invited him sometimes by saying a few words here and there, hinting, she did not talk frankly but… and Yusuf was playing deaf. He didn't listen. She tried her utmost, but to no avail. So, one day, she entered her bedroom attired nicely, called upon Yusuf, closed the door, and said to him, "*Now* you know what I want."[84] Yusuf said, [85]"I seek refuge in God from you. He is my God who honored me as a human being. The people who act against the rules of God will never be successful."

[86]The boy was not amenable by peaceful means, so he had to be forced. She came to grab him, he ran towards the door, and as she pulled him from his shirt from the back, it tore. As soon as the door was opened, her husband was standing on the other side. Naturally, she wanted to put the blame somewhere so she said to her husband, "Look, this boy is dishonest; he has to be imprisoned. He was going to spoil your honor." See, here we are talking about yet another type of woman – plotting. And the Qur'anic verse says, " إِنَّهُ مِن كَيْدِكُنَّ إِنَّ كَيْدَكُنَّ عَظِيمٌ Behold, this is an instance of your guile, O womankind! Verily, awesome is your guile!"

There are some people, nowadays, who would like to depict women as more powerful than the *Shaytān*[87] and they support their claim by pointing out that the Qur'an says, "Verily, Satan's guile is weak indeed" [88] but when it talks about the woman it says: "Verily, awesome is your guile." That's what the people say – to justify what they are saying.

So, there is now an accused and an accuser: the wife of the prime minister accusing Yusuf of asking her for something not right. And he says, no, just the opposite: she is the one who is running after me. A cousin of hers, who was standing there talking to her husband at the time, who was well-known to be a good man, and a wise person, offered to act as an arbiter and they accepted his offer. See how the people of old solved their problems? Everyone involved told their story. Then the arbiter said, "Look, if his shirt is torn from the back then he is a truthful guy and she is a liar, because he was running and she grabbed him from the back. If the shirt is torn from the front, it means that he is a liar and she is the truthful one, because he was attacking her and she grabbed the shirt from the front." Since the shirt was torn from the back, the prime minister said, now it shows that Yusuf was innocent and that you are a liar. *Fa*,[89] he said to Yusuf, don't talk about the incident, we don't need a scandal; and, turning to his wife, told her to seek God's forgiveness for what she had done.

But the gossip mills were set in motion. The women around the city started to ask whenever they met: "Do you know the news of today? The wife of the Prime Minister wants to sleep with her servant." And this was propagated here, and reported there, until the whole city came to know the story. The Qur'an says, قَدْ شَغَفَهَا حُبًّا . Note the expression of the Qur'an. Instead of saying that she fell deeply in love with him – *shaghafahu hubbaha* or *ahabbat-hu* – as we normally say, the Qur'anic expression is *qad shaghafaha hubban* – "*the love of Yusuf* *penetrated* *through the layers of the flesh of her heart*."

But, the wife was a very powerful woman. She invited the women of her social standing to a party, but there was no

[83] Imam quotes in a very hoarse, urgent, subdued voice
[84] Imam pauses. There is dead silence and a palpable suspense in the audience
[85] Imam's voice breaks with emotion
[86] A pause - and Imam's voice is back to story-telling

[87] The devil. They would like to depict the women as a more powerful temptation than the devil himself
[88] 4:76
[89] : A connecting letter in Arabic language, that connects a previous idea with a following idea, and can be translated as "then" or "so" depending on the context

dabka.[90] It was just a party for food – *muttaka'*– you know, like when we put mattresses on the ground and pillows at the back and sit – *yā'nī*, it was something luxurious in its setting. Food was served. She gave everyone of the women a knife to cut the meat, to cut the fruit, to cut whatever she had. Then, she called upon Yusuf to make his entrance. He came – a young man, attractive, strong, healthy. He entered. Every one of the women looked at him and was so carried away by his good looks that, instead of cutting the apples or the pears, they cut their fingers. When the prime minister's wife saw the blood coming out of their hands, she appeared like a lion: [Imam quotes 12:32 and explains:] this is the one you blamed me for asking him what I want. If he will not do what I am ordering him, he will be imprisoned and humiliated. See the power. And the power of love. And what did Yusuf say? Imagine, beauty, wealth, palaces, everything anyone could desire, but Yusuf said: "O God, the prison is more to my liking than what they are asking me." Nowadays, the men follow the go-go girls everywhere in the clubs, and all that business, while Yusuf says "The prison is more to my liking than what they are asking me to do. O God, if you are not going to support me at this time there is a chance that أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ." There is a chance that أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ means: O God, if you are not going to support me at this time there is a chance that I'll do what they are asking." So, that is another kind of a woman mentioned in the Qur'an to show another color for a woman.

The story of Moses, in the Qur'an, provides us an example of a woman in his life who became his wife, and it shows how he got married, and how women are supposed to propose to men, although this is considered shameful nowadays and, they say, the men should initiate the proposal. No. When we perform the marriage in Arabic, we ask the girl to say, "I propose to marry you" and he says, "I accept". That is the way of Islam. Always we say, ha! arranged marriage! The girl married without even seeing her husband, and the first time she saw him was on the wedding night. But Islam recommends that the girl be the one to propose to the man, and where do we get this idea from? Khadija. She proposed to Muhammad. She sent him a woman with the message that she was interested in marrying him. Same thing with Musa[91] – the girl proposed to him and he accepted.

Since the message of Islam, as revealed to all the prophets, starting with Adam and ending with Muhammad, is one, we can learn some things from the story of the Prophet Moses. In the story of Moses, there is mention of four women: his mother, his sister, his adopting mother or stepmother – the wife of Pharaoh – and another woman who was later his wife. The interesting feature in the story of Moses is that it encompasses the role played by woman in the life of man. In our communities, we find some people are always gearing their talk towards what a woman should, and should not, do. The story of Moses tells us who and what a woman is: she is your mother, your sister, your daughter, or your wife. These are the roles or relationships linking males with females. So, if you treat every woman as your mother, sister, daughter, or wife, and if you apply in your life what you feel towards these four, there will be no antagonism between males and females.

Finally, the Qur'anic verse [Imam quotes Arabic verse] mentions especially both males and females, and it ends by saying, God prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward. It did not say that the reward will be more for males than females or vice versa. They are equal. [The English translation of the verse is:]

" Verily, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves before God, and all men and women who give in charity, and all self-denying men and self-denying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for all of them has God readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward" [33:35].

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[90] A Lebanese dance

[91] Moses